

Louisiana Establishes Birth Defects Monitoring Network

The Louisiana Chapter led the effort to enact SB 229 which authorizes the Louisiana Birth Defects Monitoring Network (LBDMN). Enactment of this legislation reflects a multi-year effort on the part of the March of Dimes chapter advocacy resulted in the establishment of a birth defects monitoring task force, which helped the state Department of Health secure a cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to design the program plan. In addition, the task force developed the legislation

to permanently authorize the program.

The March of Dimes used its grassroots network, key contacts and public affairs activities around the state, including a day at the state capitol to secure the support of Governor Mike Foster (R) and key state legislators.

Now that the legislation has been signed into law, the chapter will work with the Department of Health to obtain necessary funding for the program. In addition, the legislation establishes a procedure through which the March of Dimes will participate in the selection of members of the LBDMN advisory board.

The *Advocacy Update* delivers legislative news about March of Dimes issues on a monthly basis.

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NGA Approves Policy Statement Supporting SCHIP Coverage of Pregnant Women

At its Summer Meeting in Providence, R.I., the National Governors Association (NGA) adopted a policy statement calling on Congress to give states the option to enroll income eligible pregnant women in State Children's Health Insurance Programs (SCHIP).

Office of Government Affairs staff worked with NGA staff to develop the initiative. March of Dimes Chapters, particularly those in South Carolina, West Virginia, Nevada and New Jersey, obtained the support of their governors for placing the proposal on the NGA agenda.

To build momentum prior to the NGA vote, OGA staff asked all chap-

ters to solicit the support of their governors and maternal and child health coalition partners. (As the *Advocacy Update* goes to press, 38 chapters reported contacting their governor and coalition partners.)

The governors unanimously approved the policy statement August 7. Specifically, the governors "call on Congress to create a state option that would allow states to provide health coverage to income eligible pregnant women under SCHIP. This small

shift in Federal policy would allow states to provide critical prenatal care and would increase the likelihood that children born to

SCHIP-eligible mothers would be enrolled in the appropriate public health insurance program."

Chapters are working to place opinion columns and editorials in local newspapers commending the governors for their support and calling

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Oregon Expands Newborn Screenings

March of Dimes Oregon Chapter volunteers and staff led the advocacy initiative to expand the state's newborn screening program. The March of Dimes worked with a division of the Oregon Health Department, the University's Metabolic Birth Defects Center and Gov. John Kitzhaber (D) to increase the number of screening tests for newborns, including the eight tests recommended by the Foundation.

The March of Dimes advocacy network generated hundreds of calls, letters and emails supporting the legislation. In addition, Chapter staff testified on behalf of the

proposal in both the state House and Senate. Gov. Kitzhaber signed the bill into law July 6. Other improve-

ments to Oregon's program include updating the testing methodology.

From the *March of Dimes Data Book for Policy Makers...*

What percentage of pregnant women report going without needed medical care during the year in which they gave birth? What is the figure for your state?

This fact—and more—is found in the 2001 Data Book.

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upon members of Congress to approve the change in current law.

The governors' support is expected to boost congressional interest in approving the federal legislation. This is a significant advocacy accomplishment and demonstrates the unique ability of the March of Dimes to work on behalf of mothers and children simultaneously in every state as well as the nation's capital.

OGA Moves Around the Corner...

The Office of Government Affairs (OGA) has moved. OGA's new mailing address is:

1146 19th Street, N.W.
6th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20036

OGA's telephone number, fax number, and email addresses are the same.

Bill Proposes Coverage for Pregnant Women

Support for providing states the flexibility to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SHIP) to include health coverage to women 19 and older continues to build in the U.S. Congress.

Representatives Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), and John Murtha (D-Pa.) introduced H.R. 260, the "Mothers and Newborns Health Insurance Act of 2001," in the U.S. House of Representatives July 24. This is the companion bill to S. 724 introduced earlier this year by Senators Christopher Bond (R-Mo.) and John Breaux (D-La.).

Early State Experiences with SCHIP and Children with Special Health Care Needs

Improving access to health coverage for women, infants and children is an advocacy priority for the March of Dimes. The Foundation worked to enact the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) at the national level, and continues to work through the chapters to implement the various state programs, and to help ensure that all eligible children are enrolled.

Because of its work on SCHIP and its history with birth defects and prematurity, the Foundation has been monitoring SCHIP coverage of children with special health care

needs. As part of the on going effort to gather information on this issue, the March of Dimes helped support an Urban Institute study by Ian Hill and others, "Are We Responding to Their Needs? States' Early Experience Serving Children with Special Health Care Needs under SCHIP."

The study's findings about the early experience with SCHIP are encouraging. The report underscores the importance of the March of Dimes recommendation for ensuring a system of prompt enrollment of newborns and other eligible

children. Of concern to the Foundation however, is the finding that waiting periods intended to limit SCHIP to uninsured children may be a barrier to enrollment for seriously ill children who are not completely uninsured, but have very limited coverage.

The March of Dimes will use these findings as well as those of other policy research studies in advocacy efforts to improve SCHIP and other federal and state programs.

**Public Affairs Conference
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March of Dimes Visits the White House

Dr. Jennifer Howse met with President George W. Bush in the Oval Office July 13 to discuss various issues of interest to the March of Dimes such as tax incentives to encourage increased charitable contributions, expanded access to prenatal care, and increased funding for birth defects research and prevention.

Dr. Howse was joined by Justin Washington, March of Dimes 2001 National Ambassador, and his parents, Dorenda and Kraig Washington, of Miami, Fla.

Justin, it turns out, is a fan of President Bush, and as a thank-you for being the 2001 National Ambassador, the March of Dimes commissioned a pair of cowboy boots for

him from "The President's Boot Maker," who modeled the boots after boots worn by the President at the the inaugural balls. Justin

showed President Bush his boots, on which the March of Dimes logo is substituted for the presidential seal.

